

## **Holiday Plan**

**Traditions we want to keep this year:**

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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Traditions we'll put on "hold" this year:**

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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_



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HELPING THE COMMUNITY HEAL

## **Coping With Holidays and Special Days After a Loss**



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# Coping with Holidays and Special Days After a Loss

Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, Thanksgiving, religious or patriotic holidays and special family days bring us together to celebrate traditions or honor an individual. Often these days present challenges even when our lives are running smoothly. Family gatherings after a trauma such as the recent Wildfires can seem overwhelming, especially when we aren't dealing with just one day but a whole season and all the anticipation and expectations that go with it. **We do have some control over what happens on these days, and we can.**

**Sometimes we worry that if we change or drop a tradition or ritual, we will lose it forever. It helps to be clear that we can make a choice to put a piece of the holiday on hold until time has helped with the healing.**

Let's look at the four "C's" of coping with the holidays and special days:

## 1. Communicate Your Needs

Communicate your needs and concerns clearly to those around you. Individuals need to decide if they want to remain at home or spend time with family and friends. Families that sit down (or phone) and discuss the holiday ahead of time do much better and avoid some of the fatigue, resentment, and disappointment that can surface. What does each family member need to make it a special day? What can comfortably be put on hold or done away with this year? What changes will make things more bearable? Can holiday preparation responsibilities belong to several family members rather than just one or two?

## 2. Change Your Routines

Some individuals and families stick exactly to their traditions after a loss, but most find it helpful to make

minor or even major changes, at least for a year or so. Having a meal at a different time of day can help. Going out to eat can ease even more stress. Opening gifts at a different time or location might be helpful. People who find worship routines too full of memories have attended a different service with a friend or neighbor. If you find yourself dreading a certain part of the holiday ritual, use your creativity to find an alternative.

## 3. Cut Back on Your Activities

**Grief after trauma is physically and mentally exhausting.** You may also be experiencing some disorientation, disorganization, or lack of motivation. **THIS IS NORMAL!!** Streamlining commitments during the holidays is an important self-care activity! You probably won't lose friends if you skip mailing cards for the holidays or birthdays this year. Gift certificates, catalogs, and checks can help you avoid hectic shopping trips. Limiting time spent with extended family and at social gatherings can conserve precious energy. While it's important to touch base with family members and special friends, setting realistic limits is essential. If you find yourself involved in an activity that just doesn't feel good, give yourself permission to withdraw.

## 4. Celebrate the Memory of What You've Lost

The word "celebrate" can also mean "to honor." Many people choose to set aside a special time or create a special way in which to honor the memory of what they have lost. In San Diego this may be loss of life as we once knew it: a home, our old neighborhood, the beautiful forest, a feeling of safety. Some light a candle or share favorite stories or memories. Having a constructive way to acknowledge the loss with others is helpful. You may not feel like the best of company, but your family and friends still need time with you. And you need time with others. **Remember that it's all right to have good times.**

**Laughter and enjoyment are essential parts of living.**